

traveled on a railway which ran beneath the ground.

Some stories of narrow escapes and the troubles that conductors and their passengers encountered on the Underground Railway have been passed down but very few records were kept and little was written down at the time because the activity was illegal and those found helping fugitive slaves faced harsh penalties if caught.

Harmon Cook, a Quaker conductor of the Underground Railroad, told of a narrow escape from pursuing horsemen. He wrote that some months later, a neighbor talking with a stranger called him over and said, "Here is the youngster who came so near getting caught going to Des Moines." The stranger cautioned Cook, "Young man, when you are out on the Lord's business, you must be more discreet. You must always listen backwards, as you are always followed. I am responsible for that track of the Underground Railroad, and I want my conductors to be more careful in the future, as things are coming to a head, and somebody is going to get hurt. Young man, never do so rash a thing again as to talk and laugh out loud on the way." He later learned that the man who had advised him was John Brown.

William Maxson of Springdale, Iowa, was another conductor on the Underground Railroad. A story is told of his shipping fugitives to Canada in sacks labeled as potatoes. As the sacks of "potatoes" were being loaded in a railroad boxcar, one of them sneezed. The railroad station master standing nearby did not examine the cargo and it was sent on its way.

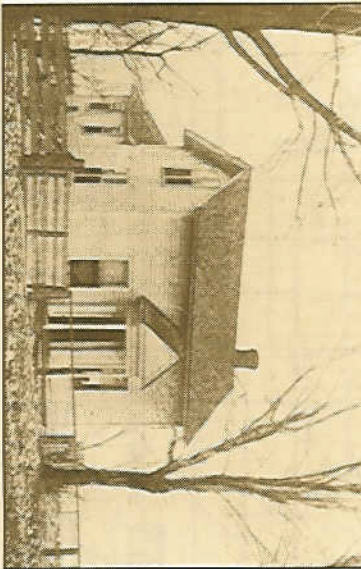
Laurie Tatum of Springdale, who was appointed Herbert Hoover's guardian when he was orphaned at age nine, used his house as a station on the Underground Railroad. He transported escaping slaves covered with cargo in a wagon from his house north of Springdale across the Cedar River at Gray's Ford to Mechanicsville. During one trip, the wagon became stuck in the sandy river bottom. He walked to a nearby house for help. The stranger suggested unloading the wagon but Tatum replied that it would not be necessary.

"What do you have on your wagon?" the stranger asked as he helped move it to solid ground. Quakers were forbidden to lie, so his answer was

creative. "Meat and wool," was the reply.

The Varney house located about two miles west of Springdale received three visitors one Sunday afternoon. A fugitive slave mother and her two children, one black and one white in appearance, entered seeking refuge from their closely pursuing master. The slave mother said that her white child made them conspicuous. Mrs. Varney steeped tea until it was very strong and used it to stain all the visible parts of the boy a walnut brown color then fed them and sent them on. She later received word that the escapees had safely reached Canada.

Herbert Hoover's uncle, Doctor Henry John Minthorn, was a driver for the Underground Railroad. In 1864, he left college to enlist in the Union army. His daughter stated that he "enlisted without parental consent" and "returned home ill and without honor among his family or The Society of Friends." His persistent ill health opened the field of medicine to him. In 1885, young Herbert Hoover left Iowa to live with the Minthorn family.



Traveler's Rest, shown in this 1911 photograph, and located on Main Street on the east edge of West Branch, was used as a stop on the Underground Railroad. The shed in the left background had a trap door on the floor with a passage that led to a small cave where four or five escaped slaves could huddle in safety.

In the vicinity of West Branch, a number of sites related to the Underground Railroad and to John Brown can be found, and the sites are identified roughly on this map. Most existing homes are private. Some are no longer standing. Portions of this brochure were provided by the staff of the Herbert Hoover National Historic Site.



The Civil War in Iowa: John Brown, Abolitionist and The Underground Railroad Cedar County, Iowa

Richard, Lord Acton, and his wife, Patricia Nassif Acton, wrote in "To Go Free: A Treasury of Iowa's Legal Heritage:" "Iowa's role in supporting the Union Cause is well known . . . Less well known is the role played by Iowa in provoking South Carolina's secession from the Union in 1860, a move that led inexorably to civil war." When Barclay Coppock escaped the hanging fate of most of John Brown's army, then Iowa Governor Samuel Kirkwood used his office to prevent Coppock's extradition to Virginia. Those actions, note the Actons, "were key ingredients cited by the South Carolina convention among its justifications for secession."

The seeds of disaster had been sown in 1857 and 1858, when Brown left the nucleus of his army—ten men—in Springdale, Iowa, to train while he tried to raise money. During this time, Barclay and Edwin Coppock [Ed. Note: Also Coppock] were drawn to the army, despite being Quakers. In the summer of 1858, they left the farm and went to join Brown and his army in Maryland. Subsequent events are well known to students of the Civil War: and Edwin would hang shortly after Brown in Virginia. The marker denoting the training grounds of Brown's army is located on Hayes Road/Maxon House.

John Brown was eulogized as a martyr by Ralph Waldo Emerson and others after the failure at Harper's Ferry and became a symbol for Northern abolitionists.

There are many sites of interest to Civil War students in Cedar County, Iowa. Quakers were pacifists and abolitionists, and these gentle folk found that the Civil War brought its own kind of conflict to their lives. Some, defying the tenets of their faith, went to war. Other Quakers in Cedar County, the faithful, turned to helping slaves fleeing from their southern masters via the Underground Railroad as a way to show their opposition to slavery. These Quakers believed in a higher law than the law of the land that required them to return slaves to their masters.

The railway was a series of routes for transporting, helping, and hiding fugitive slaves as they were passed from one friendly opponent of slavery to the next until the runaway slaves escaped to freedom. The railroad is said to have been named by a Southern slave owner who complained that Negroes escaped to Canada as easily as if they

1. **"Traveler's Rest"**—This inn was owned by James Townsend. John Brown stayed at the inn when passing through West Branch. It is located on the east side of town on Main St. (Private).

2. **Moses Varney Home**—This house was located in Section 10 of Springdale Township, and was a station on the Underground Railroad.

3. **Home of Dr. H.C. Gill**—This home in Springdale was used as a station, as were homes of several others, including many Quaker families who wished to help John Brown.

4. **Home of the Coppoc brothers**—Edwin and Barclay Coppoc lived here with their mother and stepfather, Anne and Absalom Railey. When they left to assist John Brown on the raid at Harper's Ferry, West Virginia, they told their mother they were going to Ohio.

5. **Home of John Painter**—Painter had an iron chair on the roof of his barn from which he could view the entire countryside. He assisted in the sending of weapons to John Brown for the attack on the arsenal at Harper's Ferry.

6. **Maxson House**—This house was known as the John Brown House. It was here that Brown trained his army for the raid in West Virginia. It was also a station on the Underground Railroad. Historic Marker.

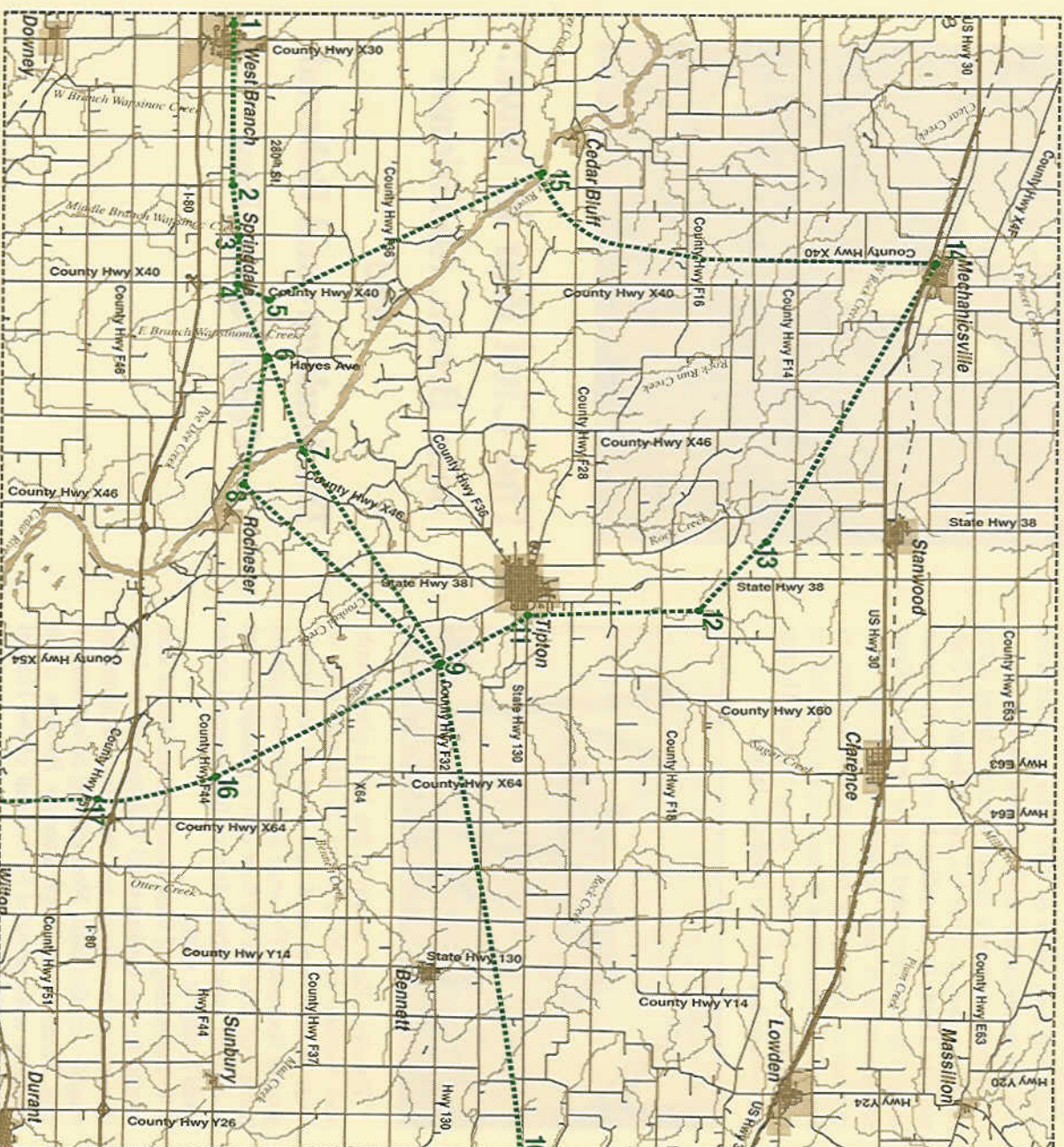
7. **Gray's Ford**—Slaves were smuggled across the Cedar River at this crossing.

8. **Rochester**—This community was also a place for crossing the Cedar River.

9. **Humphry Farm**—From this farm, fugitives were either taken east to Posten's Grove or north to Tipton.

10. **Posten's Grove**—Located on Cedar County's eastern boundary, the trail continued east from here to Clinton.

Underground Railroad Sites Cedar County, Iowa



11. **Home of Dr. Maynard**—The doctor's home was located across the street from the southeast corner of the courthouse square in Tipton, but that did not deter him from helping runaway slaves.

12. **Home of John Safley**—If Mr. Safley could not furnish transportation for the slaves, they were taken two miles west to the Yule home.

13. **Samuel Yule Home**—Slaves were hidden in the granary at this farm. Mr. Yule would often carry a basket of food to the granary and later return with the empty basket. Because of Mr. Yule's precautions, on only one occasion did any other member of his family actually see a fugitive.

14. **Mechanicsville**—The Chicago Northwestern station agent helped place slaves on trains headed for Chicago.

15. **Gower's Ferry**—Later this community was named Cedar Bluff. This was often a stop between Springdale and Mechanicsville.

16. **J.D. Lewis Home**—Lewis operated a stop on the stagecoach route and, unknown to most of his neighbors, also provided a station on the underground railroad. A windowless underground room connected by a secret tunnel to the basement under Lewis' spacious home concealed the fugitives during the daylight hours. After nightfall they made their way to the next stop.

17. **"Fort Sumter"**—Fort Sumter was the name given to the home of Jonathan Casebeer, a relative of Mr. Humphry. "Passengers" on the Underground Railroad came here from the south through Muscatine.